

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: **Grahame Weinbren**

Biography:

Grahame Weinbren is a pioneer of interactive cinema. His installations have been exhibited since 1985, including the Whitney Museum, ICA (London), the Guggenheim Museum, the Bonn Kunsthalle, and the Centre Georges Pompidou. Commissions include the National Gallery of Art, the City of Dortmund, and NTT/ICC Tokyo. His documentaries and experimental films are widely screened, mostly recently at the 2011 Montreal Festival of Films on Art. Weinbren has published and lectured for three decades on cinema, interactivity, and new media. He is the senior editor of the Millennium Film Journal and a member of the graduate faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Filmography:

All films made with Roberta Friedman

Amusement Park Composition & Decay (1973, 16mm, 00:12:30)
Bertha's Children (1976, 16mm, 00:07:00)
Between the Lines (1977, 16mm, 00:20:00)
California Institute of the Arts 1973 (1973, 16mm, 00:03:30)
California Institute of the Arts 1974/75 (1974, 16mm, 00:03:30)
Cheap Imitations Part I: Melies - India Rubber Head (1980, 16mm, 00:05:30)
Cheap Imitations Part II: Madwomen (1980, 16mm, 00:12:00)
Cheap Imitations Part III: Point Point (1980)
Cross Sections (1975, 16mm, 00:05:00)
Crotchets and Contrivances (1977, 16mm, 00:16:00)
Future Perfect (1978, 16mm, 00:11:00)
Margaret and Marion Talk about Working (1980, 16mm, 00:21:00)
Murray and Max Talk About Money (1979, 16mm, 00:15:00)
Siblings (1975, 16mm, 00:09:45)
Terms of Analysis (1983, 16mm, 00:15:00)
Verstehst Du? (1977, 16mm, 00:08:00)
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Cameraperson: Stephanie Testa

Others present: Stephanie Sapienza

Reviewed and Edited by Grahame Weinbren

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Interview date: February 19, 2010

Interviewer: Mark Toscano

Cameraperson: Stephanie Testa

Others present: Stephanie Sapienza

Reviewed and Edited by Grahame Weinbren

TAPE 1: GRAHAME WEINBREN

00:00:54

STEPHANIE SAPIENZA

Say and spell your name.

00:00:59

GRAHAME WEINBREN

My name is Grahame Weinbren. Spelled G-R-A-H-A-M-E W-E-I-N-B-R-E-N.

00:01:11

MARK TOSCANO

Thank you. Let's begin. Always need somewhere to begin. We have actually been asking people about their early life. And their background, where they're from. And what influenced them early in life to pursue the directions that they pursued. So if you could just maybe just start by talking a little bit about where you were born, raised, where you when to school.

00:01:44

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I was born in South Africa. My father was very political. His father was the Vice Chairman of the Communist party of South Africa. Until he was purged by the Stalinist for being a Trotskyite in the early 1930s.

Until 1948 The British controlled South Africa as a colony rich in natural resources, including diamonds, gold and incredible agriculture. They were terrible racists, and it was basically a slave economy. But there were no explicit "apartheid" laws, which were instituted only when the Nationalists won the elections in 1948.

When the Nationalists won the election my parents who were students at the time decided that they would leave the country. And so, in the early '50s, my parents and I [GW: I was just a baby] moved to England. So I grew up in England. We were South Africans in an inhospitable environment. This is actually an important part of how I became who I am. We were always foreigners. My parents never learned how to stand in the line at the bank,

00:03:13

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

or how to queue up at the bus stop. Of course the parents of all of my friends in school had gone through the Blitz, the multi-year bomb attacks on England during the second World War together, or they had served in the military during the 6 year conflict. I know, from just having been in New York on 9/11 that there's a real sense of community that develops when you're in the midst of a genuine crisis or large-scale tragedy. So there was a strong bond between all of the English parents of my friends, which very much excluded my parents — and, as a consequence, also me.

00:03:48 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So my parents had very few close friends in England. We lived with a sense of alienation and isolation for basically my whole childhood. My younger brothers were much more integrated into England than I was, but because the family moved many, many times when I was young, but finally settled by the time I was a teenager. Yeah, they were foreigners even though their native language was English. But they took a lot of pictures. And, by the time I was 13 or 14, I realized that I could take the family's slides, put them in sequence with music and control how they changed in significance depending on the music, on the sequence, on the context of each image.

00:04:32 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I didn't think of myself as being a filmmaker or anything like that, but, I had this kind of sixth sense about how to control the sense of an image through what I later learned to call editing. Later I started photographing slides myself, and then for my 15th birthday I was given an 8 millimeter.

00:05:10 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

But I didn't have editing equipment. And so it didn't interest me that much. I mean I shot with it, but that was not really where my heart was in the filmmaking process. I came to the United States after I went to college in England. I came here for graduate school in Philosophy and began to make slide shows.

00:05:46 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I was with Roberta at the time. We made a quite a number of slide pieces when we were in college at Buffalo. Some of them were even interactive. One was called "The Apple Piece:" people sat in a little room about this size (about 6 by 10) and they were control handed an apple and a slide remote control. There was a soundtrack that gave the viewer orders: to bite the apple, to press the slide remote. They controlled their own slide show as they were eating an apple, and the voice on the soundtrack was synchronized with the images they saw. I think the piece was about the evils of pesticides, and I know that it contained images of apples decreasing bite by bite and the Buffalo cemetery in the snow.

00:06:25 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

That was our big success. We showed it at Both Ends Gallery, a little gallery we ran in Buffalo. And it was about 1970 or '71 I guess.

00:06:38 **MARK TOSCANO**

But, when you were younger had you taken an interest in the other, in other arts and music and...

00:06:44

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah I had violin lessons. I listened to classical music a lot. I was surrounded by the emergence of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones etc. But, rock music didn't interest me that much. However, like the Stones, I became very interested in America Blues and Jazz. Those records were easily available in England. And, from the time I was a little boy one of the places that my parents could escape to and feel more part of an international community was the great British museums, the great London museums. So, I spent a lot of time with paintings from an early age.

00:07:18

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

My parents were not interested in cinema. We hardly ever went to the movies. We didn't have a television. So I didn't really see moving images much when I was a child. But, yes certainly the traditional arts, including contemporary painting and to a certain extent contemporary music also.

00:07:36

MARK TOSCANO

Did you paint yourself at all?

00:07:38

GRAHAME WEINBREN

No, no I played the violin.

00:07:41

MARK TOSCANO

What was some of your favorite work, in painting that you saw?

00:07:44

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I remember when I was about 14 or 15 my favorite painter was the German Expressionist Oscar Kokoschka: I appreciated the fluidity and movement in his work. There's a wonderful picture of a portrait of Pablo Casals as a young man playing the cello in which you can see the movement of the cello bow and the sweet sound is conveyed in the layered color and rapid brushstroke.

00:08:22

MARK TOSCANO

So, when, when did you come to the States?

00:08:25

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I came to the States in 1968 when I finished college in London. I had studied Philosophy at the University of London

00:08:39

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I came here for graduate school. Went to the place that would support me the best. I didn't really think I would become a philosopher, but they gave me a really good scholarship and teaching fellowship: enough money to live off. So I went to graduate school in Buffalo and it just happened that in that period from about 1969 to 1972 Gerald O'Grady was beginning to build up this incredible experimental media studies center.

00:09:13 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

He would bring in many filmmakers who would often premiere their films there. I remember seeing Brakhage showing *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* —probably shown for the first time. Five or six people were in the audience, in one of those old fashioned tiered lecture halls. I remember how powerful that experience was. I remember Hollis Frampton showing *Zorns Lemma*, again possibly a premiere, and certainly a formative moment in my development.

00:09:43 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Michael Snow came and I think showed *La Region Centrale*, or maybe it was *Back and Forth*. Roberta was in the Art Department studying photography. I was in the Philosophy Department. And, although we wanted to take courses and take advantage of the Media Studies Department that was developing in the English Department, O'Grady had restricted it basically to English Department students.

00:10:19 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So, we were not really able to take the workshops of the classes, but were able to be involved in many events that were peripheral to the Media Studies Department but part of the explosion of media that were around Buffalo in this period. For example, Stan Vanderbeek came once to do a performance and both of us volunteered to help him, and he had us making abstract visual by drawing with our fingers on smoked glass on an overhead projector. We were also involved a lot with theater at the time: we did projections for many shows for plays and dance performances. We were photographers and dancers in a piece by Graham Smith and Christine Lawson about the Vietnam War – we wandered around the smoky stage shooting photographs of the simulated war, which we later printed and showed. And, for the Music Department, so we did a lot of slide shows for the Creative Associates, a kind of residency program for contemporary music associated with the Music Department.

00:10:49 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Lejaren Hiller was the director of the Creative Associated and any time they needed visual components for a piece, they would hire us.

00:11:37 **MARK TOSCANO**

And, you studied Philosophy there, so I'm curious how you experienced the theater or whatever else was going on with you. Not just go to the states, but just I mean you didn't go there to study Art in Buffalo, but you found your way to that. I'm just curious if there's a connection there?

00:11:56

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah. My professor in London was probably the greatest living philosopher of art or aesthetician. His name was Richard Wollheim. And, he turned me on to painting in a very, very different way. He would teach the incoming first year students for the whole first year.

00:12:33

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

His course was the Introduction to Philosophy and at the time he was writing one of his early books called *Art and Its Objects* which was about the way painting had meaning. His fundamental questions were: how does a picture represent something in the world? and how does a picture convey or express emotion? These questions and his approach to answering them has formed a large part of the foundation of my writing and thinking, as well as my filmmaking to some extent.

00:13:37

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I don't think of these as different activities — the writing and the filmmaking. But, we'll come to that later. But, my work as artist, writer, whatever is highly influenced by my studying with Wollheim.

00:14:09

MARK TOSCANO

Do you want to talk about that influence, or do you want to save that for later? It could make more sense if we talk about the work that you got into and then come back to that, or...

00:14:17

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Well, it depends on how you want to organize it. You know it could be biographical--it could be biographical or we could do topical.

00:14:25

MARK TOSCANO

I'm so do you mind at least talking somewhat about it?

00:14:30

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Not at all I've been writing about film and filmmaking, new media, interactivity, and technology for many years, I guess the mid '70s. At least I've been published since the mid '70s. I've been writing longer than that. And, the work that I do really stems from the question of how a moving image or series of moving images, or a series of images can have meaning distinct from what it depicts.

00:15:16 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

In other words, I'm not interested in talking about what the story is, or what the elements of the story are, what greater significance the elements of the story have, which is a standard way that people approach film criticism. But, I'm interested in the way works of cinema, or works of video, moving images can contain the same kind of expression that a painting does, or how time-based art works carry emotion. And this basic question is raised and analyzed very effectively in the writings of Richard Wollheim.

00:15:52 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

One idea he developed for example, this idea of 'seeing as?' [GW: which he borrowed from Wittgenstein's writing, another one of my intellectual influences] What he called 'seeing as' where you see two things, one *as* the other: for example, one sees the surface of a canvas *as* a scene with depth. One of the things that brings meaning into play with respect to a painting is the interplay between seeing the surface and seeing an the illusion of depth in the surface. Wollheim was very specific that he was not only thinking about figurative or depictive painting, but also applying this very set of ideas to abstract art.

00:16:34 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So, he often discusses Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. And the next question is how can a painting have expressive or emotional meaning as well as depictive meaning? So when I started to write, which was about the group of filmmakers that I was involved with in Los Angeles, I tried to take some of the ideas I'd picked up by reading Wollheim and other contemporary philosophers and apply them to experimental film.

00:17:08 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

My first major published article was about David Wilson. It was in the LAICA Journal. I was interested in the political implications of different cinematic approaches to space. So I contrasted Wilson's work with that of Brakhage and Snow, which I saw as capturing and owning and making space their own. Whereas David's work was very much about not making space his own, but looking for it as if it was something separate and different from him and not incorporated into his own psychology or vision. The difference between subject and subject matter is emphasized in Wilson's early films, and I thought of this as a political gesture.

00:17:47 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I don't want to go into this in too much detail, but, I think you can see the link between these ideas Wollheim's approach to painting, which always focused on different kinds of attention, where you have different ways of seeing or looking at the same image and the way those different ways interplay.

00:18:16

MARK TOSCANO

So, tell that third thing.

00:18:18

GRAHAME WEINBREN

It's about the thing that's produced. Although looking at the surface and the brush marks is a different experience than looking, for example what it's a picture of. And, it's not easy to do both at the same time. The meaning of a painting is often produced in the interplay, in the interface between those two different ways of seeing and reconciling them. And, moving from one to another.

The work of Pat O'Neill is so accessible to this way of thinking. Because, he presents so many multiple ways of navigating his films—through a single image, through a single moment, through the film as a whole; and these different ways of looking are often inconsistent. So during a single film you find you have to change gears many times. So, over the years I've done some writing about that aspect of O'Neill's cinema.

00:20:32

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Well, as I say I went to Buffalo I, here I am at the end of my three years of undergraduate work in London. And, I did not want to stay in England, because partly because of my experience as a foreigner in an inhospitable environment and, more importantly, my feeling that lives were so clearly tracked and defined in advance. Even though it was 1968 and there were supposed to be huge societal changes going on in England, it was still fundamentally class-ridden: who you were and what was possible for you was based on your background and education and accent.

00:21:13

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So I felt as if my life was kind of laid out in front of me like a railway track. As a 20 year old I so much wanted to break out of that cell. I'd live in America for awhile because my father had a job for a couple of years at Stanford. Although I was unhappy at that period I could feel that part of the hype about the United States – the Horatio Alger hype – had some basis in reality: as long as you were white and had a college degree, enough money to pay the rent, and no debilitating habits: you can find your way into different paths. You can make more decisions about your life than you can in the kind of European background that I grew up in. So, that was the reason that I came here. So I looked around and I didn't know what to do. All I knew about was following the path I was already on, so I applied to graduate school in Philosophy. And, I took the best offer without knowing any distinction between schools. Also there wasn't the kind of sharp distinction between universities that we see now.

00:22:43

MARK TOSCANO

So, when did you get here?

00:22:55

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I got to the Philosophy Department of the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1968. I entered the PhD program and I stayed there for four years. I was awarded my PhD in 1976 with a dissertation on Wittgenstein's "Picture Theory of Meaning".

00:24:04

MARK TOSCANO

Okay, so you were in Buffalo getting—you were in the PhD program, but you met Roberta [Freidman] and did you start to work together?

00:24:11

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yes it was in Buffalo that we started to make these slide pieces that I spoke about earlier. The big piece was called "The Apple Piece." We did a lot of work with experimental theater. We did a lot of slide work with experimental theater groups. There was a lot interest in the Gesamtkunstwerk at that time. A lot of people wanted to do multimedia works [GW: which doesn't mean what it means now]: it meant that they would incorporate along with their musical or theatrical performance images, projected images of various kinds.

00:24:45

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Not too many people would do film in these circumstances, but we did a lot of slides. Both there was a wonderful experimental music center in Buffalo perhaps the best in the country. Run by Lejaren Hiller who was a close associate of Cage. And, he brought in the most amazing experimental musicians from all over the world who would be there as kind of fellows. And, they would do their work and many of them would invite us, Roberta and me to provide visuals for their musical performances.

00:25:23

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And, it was always a collaboration. I mean they would never say, you know I need a picture of a mushroom at this moment. It was always we would be involved in the creative process. Because, that's very much how things were then. So we collaborated with a lot of really great musicians and theater as well. And, this is where really in a way where we developed our craft. And, I don't think we saw ourselves as particular kind of image maker. I don't think we saw a sharp distinction between making films, or making slides, or making photographs.

00:26:00 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We also did a lot of pieces that were kind of 'interactive' before the word. We were very influenced in the notions and the ideas of in--of indeterminacy that were advocated by Cage. So, made quite a lot of pieces where the actual images that were shown were determined by some kind of outside process. I remember making a big lottery wheel that you would spin. I forget the details of this piece, but it was really hard to make this lottery wheel with lights that came around, lights that came on all around as the thing span, the kind of object you see on TV game shows. Where it landed somehow determined which image would appear.

We did a lot of things like that. I don't think we had a film camera at the time. Most of what we were doing at the time involved slides, and we, and as I said we did not have access to the film workshops that were run by Gerald O'Grady in the English Department. But what we were doing was very film-like, because it was always, always about slide sequencing.

00:27:42 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I remember one piece that we made for Beethoven's 200th Birthday involving a bank of slide projectors and an array of remotes that I would play like kind of an instrument. And, the different slides would come up in different areas of the screen. It was always very much about sequencing slides which is very kind of proto-filmmaking.

00:29:08 MARK TOSCANO

And, was it something that you discovered also because Roberto was in the photo department like a mutual interest thing?

00:29:15 GRAHAME WEINBREN

Well, as I said, you know it's, it had to do very much with what I spoke about earlier about kind of discovering this when I was a young teenager. That it was something I kind of had a knack for and was just fascinated by the way things coming together and coalesce based on their sequences and rhythms in time. At the same time it is connected with the philosophical ideas that interested me about different ways of seeing the same thing and how this determines meaning.

00:29:44 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

At the center of my philosophical studies was the question of meaning and how meaning operated: for example, how images could have meaning. Soon one begins to notice that the meaning of an image [GW: or a word for that matter] is often determined by context. So, that would lead into the notion that slide sequences were much more interesting than individual slides.

00:30:34 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

It was in Buffalo that I really became interested in contemporary music. Roberta and I also had a radio program in Buffalo which we would play we'd play both contemporary music and we'd play folk music and all kinds of music. And, sometimes we'd play it simultaneously, so you would get, you know a blues by Mississippi John Hurt with Terry Riley's "In C" both playing at the same time. The radio station was run by the university.

00:30:59 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It was a big stated university with an incredible amount of facilities a lot of money. Money was collected from the students in students fees, which was managed by the student union, and students could apply for funding for all kinds of projects. It was a rich time.

00:31:18 **MARK TOSCANO**

Who was on faculty at that time that you interacted with that had some influence, even if it was just the work they were presenting? You had mentioned Gerald O'Grady.

00:31:28 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Donald Blumberg the photographer was on the faculty. And, John Barth the postmodern novelist, who I never interacted with, but I had always admired tremendously was on the faculty. As was J.M Coetzee, who won the Nobel Prize for fiction a couple of years ago.

00:31:55 **MARK TOSCANO**

And, at that point you said you didn't have access to the film facilities, but was there any interaction with that department?

00:32:02 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Well, there wasn't a department: it was a division of the English Department. It was only after we left that media studies was set up. So, no, not really. No interaction really.

00:32:13 **MARK TOSCANO**

Buffalo is now known as having had this amazing film department, but that was a little bit later.

00:32:25 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

It started a year or two after we left and I think in 1973 or '74. That's when it got incorporated as an actual department. And, I think that's when he, when O'Grady brought in Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton and Tony Conrad. James Blue the documentary filmmaker was also there.

Three Rituals was a collaboration with Lejaren Hiller who was a composer and musician and was the head of the Creative Associates. He had made this major piece with Cage called harpsichords spelled H-P-S-C-H-D in Illinois which was a huge, huge multimedia piece with many harpsichords and film and slides and all kinds of projections and many musicians.

00:34:19 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And, it was kind of a new direction for Cage because it was so large. Hiller wanted to repeat this kind of experience in this piece that he called *Three Rituals for Two Percussionists* and he asked Roberta and me to make the images for it. And, we did. For the first version they were slides. And, then we went to CalArts and Hiller was continuing to tour the piece and at that point we started to work on the animation stand and made these very abstract geometrical single colored shapes into movies.

00:35:02 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

They were supposed to be part of piece of *Three Rituals* which I don't think ever got mounted again. But, that, but some of the teachers at CalArts, particularly Jules Engel, were very excited about this geometric shapes film which we did with computer program. It was not a computer controlled animation stand. It was an Oxberry, but you, but each of the movements of the platform were numbered, so you could make a computer program and input the numbers generated by the program by hand. This could produce quite beautiful movements, like a pendulum or a billiard ball. I was kind of adept at this skill at the time. I made a computer program on a little pocket calculator that could generate list of numbers. A hexagon and slowly spins and changes direction in a kind of organic movement that was determined by sine wave curves. So, the motion had this sense of natural movement that was quite extraordinary and unusual. It was nice to shoot in 35, but I don't know if these films were ever shown outside the classroom.

00:36:58 MARK TOSCANO

But, it does beautifully suggest anyway the origins in your filmmaking working with people of the media and other artists and this, again the indeterminacy and response to another art form and all that. I feel like the traditional thing-- well I don't know what's traditional, but often people are coming into some film, because they're interested in films. And, you came in it from a totally different direction.

00:37:31 GRAHAME WEINBREN

That's absolutely right.

00:37:31 MARK TOSCANO

In terms of theory, in terms of painting and even music, and working with other artists.

00:37:37

GRAHAME WEINBREN

You're right.

00:37:39

MARK TOSCANO

And, at some point you made a stand-alone film. And, was that the amusement park piece, was that the...

00:37:45

GRAHAME WEINBREN

In the year we were leaving Buffalo for CalArts which would have been 1972, we got interested in abandoned amusement parks. These are places that are full of life and color, that have a special architectural or even sculptural quality when they are still and empty.

00:38:30

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We started to shoot in black and white. I don't know where we got the camera from actually. It was probably shot with a Bolex. We did a lot of shooting in the winter at Ryeland Amusement Park and Rockaway Playland (which doesn't exist any more)—amusement parks around New York.

00:38:56

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Which we then took to CalArts where Roberta was in the film department and I got a job in the humanities department.

00:39:05

MARK TOSCANO

So, before you continue with that can you talk about the decision to go to CalArts and where that came from?

00:39:15

GRAHAME WEINBREN

CalArts was brand new. It had moved to its new building in 1971 and it had been a couple of years before that in downtown L.A.

00:40:01

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

It was really exciting—everybody knew about it. It was all over the arts community. And for us, the notion of being in a school in which the breakdown between the different divisions was discouraged so that again a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk could emerge in collaborations between people in different departments, with different skills and approaches—this was very exciting to us since that's what we were doing, that's what we were interested in. And, so, we wrote to them. I was accepted as a teacher in the Humanities Department and Roberta was accepted as a graduate student in the Film Department. And, by the time I got there the person who hired me had been fired, Margot Kamen. She was the wife of the comedian Milt Kamen who was quite a big Borscht Belt comedian.

00:41:15 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So, she'd been fired, I had a contract so they had to keep me. But, it was clear it wasn't going to last very long. And all of our expectations about the interactions between departments were rather disappointed I have to say. It turned out to be a bit more of a conventional film school, conventional art school than we had expected. I mean there was a lot of change happening in arts—people were very much moving into conceptual art and there was interest in the philosophy I had been studying and was writing about for my Ph.D.

So there were sharp divisions between the departments which was actually a bit disappointing. But, we, we finished the amusement park film and found a composer in the music department who was interested in working with us: Carl Stone. So Carl Stone made the music for *Amusement Park* and taught me a lot about composition around film edits, which I had really not thought about before, being more interested in the way music synched up with the images. But that's what he did and it's great. He made a beautiful score for it actually. I still love it. The movie I don't know, but the score and the relationship between the architectural images and the music I think is quite wonderful.

00:43:02 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And so we became experimental filmmakers.

It really was a very genuine collaboration. Carl taught me a tremendous amount about what it is to put music to a film. We still didn't quite see ourselves as anything except mixed media artists. But gradually as time went on, yeah we became filmmakers.

00:45:06 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The lack of distinction between media that had drawn us to the school was turned out to be a false hope. I think CalArts in principle hoped that would be the case, but it just didn't happen. On the other hand the school was full of miracles. They had a wonderful gamelon, there was the monkey chant, the African drummers, an incredible percussion department. World-renowned artists, actors, dancers, musicians, designers, photographers, filmmakers. And maybe it's not a surprising that they each conceived themselves as working within their particular division. And not expanding into a larger sense of what the arts could be.

00:45:40 MARK TOSCANO

But, then somebody like Carl although he was in the music department was interested in collaborating, he did a few film soundtracks.

00:45:46

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Well, but he approached his work as composing film sound tracks, not as a kind of collaboration with a filmmaker. I don't in any way mean to minimize his work. Just the general CalArts culture did not encompass quite the approach that we had hoped.

00:46:14

MARK TOSCANO

So, how long were you a teacher there and she was a student there?

00:46:19

GRAHAME WEINBREN

She was a student for two years. I was fired after the first year. I shaved my beard actually that was really the mistake. Because I was pretty much the same age as the students. And, I shaved my beard and I guess the administration realized how young I was. And, the dean said took me into his office and he said to me well, you know if I was a young man like you I'd get a real profession. I'm like well, what would be a real profession?

00:46:51

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

He said oh, I'd go to dental school, or something. It wasn't quite as insulting as it sounds because what he meant was he had a very difficult life as a Jazz musician. And if he'd only had a real profession, things would have been a lot easier for him . . . but it came out a little rough I have to say. [laugh]

00:47:15

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I'd taught a wonderful course on Wittgenstein's Tractatus on which I was writing my dissertation at the time and which the absolute brightest students I'd ever met in my life attended. That was the class that included David Salle the painter, photographer Jim Welling, musician Earl Howard the musician, and Judith Stein, the conceptual artist. It was really just an extraordinary class and basically these guys helped me write my dissertation. You know, so yes, so it was a very valuable experience.

00:47:50

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

They paid me \$8,000 for my teaching for that year. Which we could barely live off. But, of course tuition was about \$2,500. So, it wasn't a huge burden for Roberta who I think got loans.

00:48:06

MARK TOSCANO

It was \$2500?

00:48:08

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah, of course. 28 I think.

00:48:10

MARK TOSCANO

Or, 28.

00:48:11 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

And, she hung around CalArts for a couple years more as a lot of people did using the optical printer. I think we made *Bertha's Children* there after she was no longer a student. You couldn't sign out you couldn't sign out cameras when you were no longer a student there. But you still had your key you could go in and use the printer.

00:48:44 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

They encouraged people to do that. There wasn't too much demand on the printer anyway. Adam kind of lived in there. Pat O'Neill by that time had already got his own printer. David Wilson was using it. But, there were really not too many people on that machine. So, we could I think we could use it for a couple of years more. And, we made a couple of films on it the next few years.

00:49:09 **MARK TOSCANO**

So, you continued to live in the Los Angeles area?

00:49:13 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

We lived in L.A. until 1978. When I left Cal Arts I got a job at UC Santa Barbara in the Philosophy Department which lasted a couple of years. And, Beverly O'Neill got me a job in the Humanities Department at Otis Art Institute. Then I got a job at Cal State Dominguez Hills.

00:49:51 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And, they wanted to put me on the tenure track and again I had this vision of my life stretching out in front of me. Roberta was ready to leave California. So, we came to New York in 1978. Otherwise, I would have been a philosophy professor at Cal State Dominguez Hills for the rest of my life—which was not an attractive prospect.

00:50:19 **MARK TOSCANO**

But, you did teach there for a bit?

00:50:21 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

I taught there for a year. I taught there for a year.

00:50:59 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It was a very problematic time before people starting using computers because young kids didn't feel the need to learn to read. Somehow they could get into Cal State Dominguez Hills, which had to develop all kinds of programs to help students read and write. I mean they could spell out words, but they couldn't hold up a page and have it flow into their minds the way everybody can now because of computers. My department instituted many different kinds of literacy program.

The students were in a different place than I was used to. My colleagues were great. But yeah I just couldn't see myself doing that forever. I could see that actually my plan to use teaching philosophy as a day job wasn't quite going to work out work out. You have to make a commitment.

And by this time I really was quite committed to making films as really what I wanted to do. And, what I thought I could make a contribution in and it meant a lot to me. So, I really did think of the teaching as kind of going in and doing this hour and a half a couple of times a week and spend the rest of the time working on films.

00:52:26 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And, that was never going to work out, especially at a place like the Cal State system. It wasn't going to work out in the UC system because they expected you to publish and, you know commit to your field. And, it wasn't going to work out in the Cal State system because of the administrative work required of the faculty. And, so yeah, so I came to New York. I came to New York got little jobs, carpentry, helping people build their lofts stuff like that and made films.

00:54:32 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

The films that I remember making a huge impression on me when I was in Buffalo. They're really only two and those are two that I mentioned; *Zorns Lemma* and *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes*. I remember at the time being upset with Frampton because he didn't use a tripod. And I thought that the handheld aspect of it was really distracting from this very tight conceptual work. Now of course I understand the reference to the body in an overdetermined conceptual environment.

00:55:03 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

But what really struck me most powerfully about that piece was that it offered an alternative way of organizing material in time. As opposed to the Brakhage stream of consciousness temporality, ZL proposed a method of organizing material in time that was as systematic as narrative. And, that was a huge, huge breakthrough for me. And it changed my thinking about what cinema could be. I know that of my generation I'm not alone—for people of my generation that film was a breakthrough. Much more than (nostalgia) which

does depend on older cinematic traditions—it's a series of small narratives. But, there's nothing narrative about *Zorns Lemma*, even there are fragmented small events unfolding through the film; but it is a study of the graphic design of New York City of that period. So, it's a kind of documentary about the city organized in this highly systematic way. I was ready for a cinematic system that did not depend on narrative. So it was a huge influence on me.

The other one was *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* from which I got the idea that you could use film as a way of feeling your way through a situation, you could capture the way you would experience a situation. The whole film is about what Brakhage allows himself, or is able, to look at after a certain period. Now, I don't know if I believe him when he tells that story. Brakhage has had a lot of stories. But, the film certainly gives the sense of that kind of inner personal narrative of finally being able to look in the face being taken off.

00:57:08 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

But, being able to get to that stage where you could, and you as a viewer go through this experience of the morgue with the filmmaker. For me it was always about how to structure or organize material in time and that's why I told you the story about what interested me as a teenager. It was always for me about articulating time . . . and still is.

End of tape 1

TAPE 2: GRAHAME WEINBREN

00:00:43

MARK TOSCANO

Okay so there are plenty of films and projects we could talk about if you're up for it.

00:01:02

GRAHAME WEINBREN

It was the first film that we, that we, *Amusement Park Composition and Decay* was the first film that we completed as a film, wanted to show as a film, and thought of as a kind of freestanding object.

00:02:12

GRAHAME WEINBREN

It was the film with which I really learned about film editing. I spent many, many hours editing a Moviescope, and rewinds and I learned what editing meant, and what power it had.

00:03:12

GRAHAME WEINBREN

The *Making of Americans* was next, and that was Roberta's thesis film at CalArts. And in a lot of ways the collaboration on that film is much more weighted towards her than towards me. I think the interest in Gertrude Stein came from the same place as our interest in John Cage: these American avant gardists.

00:03:48

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

That's where the *Making of Americans* text came from. It was very much a musical idea: the idea of making that text into a kind of a multi-choral musical piece. And using our newly-found optical printing skills to put it together. It was also very influenced by notions of feminism in the air at the time, making the woman's voice central rather than peripheral.

00:04:27

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

But the aesthetic driving force was the idea of cinema as music. And music not in the Marie Menken sense of visual music, but more at the level of structure: developing a cinematic structure parallel to the way that a musical piece would be structured. And of course the tripartite structure is on the one hand influenced by *Zorns Lemma*, but also by the notion of sonata form, which I'm sure is also one of the forces behind *ZL*.

00:04:55

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The central section is very much thought as kind of accelerando, where the edits get faster and faster. I developed the slowly decreasing pause lengths on the Cal Arts computer [GW: which by the way didn't have a CRT or any drives — it was run by punch tape and dot matrix printer output].

00:05:18 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Larry Cuba taught me how to write in Basic and I somehow generated this program where the, the six elements of the central section of *Making Of Americans* would get closer and closer together and increasingly overlapping but in an unpredictable way based on the inclusion of random numbers.

00:05:51 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

This meant we could transfer the numbers generated by the program to six runs of the optical printer, and we wouldn't get to see how the voices overlapped and echoes each other until the film was synched up. The idea of developing a process that would generate something that was unpredictable to the makers very exciting, I think, to both of us.

00:06:26 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

The opening section was a long tracking shot across a set, a landscape of objects that expressed the life of a woman. Roberta put a number of objects in there that were personal to her, but also gathered objects from friends and acquaintances. We worked with our friend Anthony Forma. I am still working with him. He has become a highly sought after professional DP, so we have to fit our working sessions between his jobs for television programs and major documentaries.

So Anthony shot it. For a rehearsal we shot it in video as a test, so we could look at it and see exactly how the moves were going to be choreographed. The half inch video piece is in the collection of the Long Beach Museum of Art.

00:07:27 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

This part of the film took a long time at one of the CalArts studios. So that was the opening part, the biography. Then there was the central section made up of six women's voices in a split screen arrangement that I discussed earlier. And for the final section, we went around with one of the school cameras, and made candid shots of the six women in their homes.

00:08:01 **MARK TOSCANO**

Isn't it, is it the women that are in the middle section?

00:08:03 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yes.

00:08:10 **MARK TOSCANO**

And each captured in a different way.

00:08:11 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

We went to each of their houses and whatever they were doing we would set up and shoot. I shot some of it, Roberta shot some of it. I like the contrast with the first two sections.

00:08:52 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So that was the *Making Of Americans*, we were very happy with it. I still am. It showed quite a lot. And it caused phenomenally hostile reactions, which was just amazing to us. Unexpected. They showed it at the first FilmEx, which is the Los Angeles International Film Exhibition.

00:09:18 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

They showed it as a short before, I think it was a new Altman movie. It's 15 minutes long. Roberta and I were sitting in the audience with some friends, and the hostility was amazing: people had the idea that they booed and jeered loud enough it would be taken off the screen. We didn't make it with that idea in mind at all.

00:09:44 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It was just absolutely shocking. Now people are able to hear many voices at once: the world has changed. But at that time the idea that there would be two voice on screen at the same time was, I don't know, it was obscene.

00:10:04 **MARK TOSCANO**

Let alone six.

00:10:04 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Well there are only six in certain places. It doesn't even happen that much. But it was elicited genuine fury. I thought we might get beaten up. Anyway the big idea, again, was the notion of developing an alternative temporal structure for the cinematic. And maybe that's what disturbed the Hollywood audience for the first Los Angeles International Film Festival. But it's basic idea that's driven me, forever, since I was a child.

00:10:42 **MARK TOSCANO**

It was '74.

00:10:42 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

It was, must have been '74, because it was Roberta's thesis film. When she got her degree from Cal Arts.

00:10:52 **MARK TOSCANO**

Did you have a hostile reaction generally when it was shown?

00:10:59 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

The only one I remember is FilmEx. It was the big screen: what an exciting moment it was for us! And then this absolute torture.

00:11:10 **MARK TOSCANO**

So there was, there's, you had no positive reactions, just people's negative reaction? Was it thrilling in a way that people hated it?

00:11:18

GRAHAME WEINBREN

No.

00:11:18

MARK TOSCANO

No, okay.

00:11:19

GRAHAME WEINBREN

It was unexpected and unpleasant. We never made films so that people would love us. We never had anything to sell, and weren't particularly interested in acclaim or glory. But we thought people would go along for the ride and get the same kind of pleasure out of this musical voice structure that we did.

00:11:42

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I actually can't speak for both of us. I should say I just expected to people, for people to get the same kind of musical pleasure out of the multiple voices used as instruments that I did. It's the same as listening to a piece of music, except it has images as well. I thought that was a really strong and powerful experience.

00:12:06

MARK TOSCANO

Was Steve Reich your influence at all?

00:12:08

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yes, yes, absolutely. He was part of the kind of musical scene that we were, we were listening to. But Reich's music was a little easier than the music that we kind of tended to favor more. Jim Fulkerson was a collaborator and Jim Tenney's music meant a lot to us.

00:12:31

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I liked Reich's music a lot, but it was more in the kind of way I liked, I don't know, The Beatles or something.

00:13:22

MARK TOSCANO

So *Making Of Americans*, I'm trying to figure out where *Cross Sections* fits into this, though. Because I feel like that was '75.

00:13:43

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Well it's, it's, again, a musical structure. Roberta was collaborating with was this percussion group lead by Larry Stein, who was a composer and percussionist at CalArts. He was in the John Bergamo Group. And he had figured out this job where he would get a bunch of guys from CalArts with their percussion instruments, and go around to local schools and perform because they didn't have much arts programming in schools in California . . .

00:14:19 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

. . . but they did have grants to hire outside musicians to do workshops and so on. So the CalArts Percussion Ensemble would go around and teach kids how to make little instruments, for example out of film cans with beans in them and things like that. And they would play a concert. And concerts always included visuals.

00:14:37 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Roberta did the visuals for these shows, and through this experience we became very interested in percussion. Out of this interest we developed an idea of making a piece which relied on the fact that projectors don't run in synch. So *Cross Sections* is made of intermittent hits of various kinds, based on rhythms that we discussed with Larry Stein.

00:15:07 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

He taught us about three against two rhythms, and the way you could divide a bar up into three beats or four beats or six beats. Things like that, which I guess I kind of knew about, but never thought about. So *Cross Sections* is a double projection piece based on I think matching musical soundtracks. We invited a CalArts dancer to collaborate, and we put her in a black bag, so she could make different geometrical but also human shapes.

00:15:32 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We used those shapes as mattes, to make outline of different colors on black backgrounds. And with the two projectors would slowly get out of sync, so there'd be the internal rhythms of each film, and the rhythms that would develop out of the fact that you couldn't start both projectors at the same instant, no matter how hard you tried; and the speed that they'd always run would be slightly different. So gradually over the period of that 10 or 12 minutes, you would get a whole new film out of different kinds of rhythms that were unpredictable. It's the same idea of indeterminism, and looking for ways of generating music that could surprise the filmmaker. That's *Cross Sections*. That I haven't seen, I'm even surprised you found it, I haven't seen that since the '70s.

Did it show at all? Or...

00:16:47 GRAHAME WEINBREN

It probably showed in a few places. I can't remember very well. I yeah, I, I'm sure we, we played it a few times, 'cause I can remember it. We just certainly didn't have two 16 millimeter projectors. I mean, a lot of places at that time would have, a lot of theaters would have two 16 millimeter projectors for changeover. So but many of them were wired so they couldn't both run at the same time. And, but, yeah, I, I honestly don't know whether and when it was shown.

00:17:17

MARK TOSCANO

Do you remember doing the piece a little promo film for CalArts?

00:17:20

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Oh, yes, sure.

00:17:23

MARK TOSCANO

Do you want to tell us about that?

00:17:23

GRAHAME WEINBREN

I think it was the head of development or somebody in admissions asked Roberta, who was probably working for that department, if she would make a little film. And so we made a film that was supposed to look like the Cal Arts ID card, and we asked all of the animators and, I can't remember who was in it. I guess it was Cal Arts personalities, right?

00:17:59

MARK TOSCANO

Well, yeah, different instructors from different departments.

00:18:04

GRAHAME WEINBREN

We asked CalArts animators to put graffiti on their faces. So Adam Beckett did it, Kathy Rose did it, a lot of different people. We'd give each one a little section, and they drew a mustache a beard, or and eye patch. Then on the optical printer we'd move the eye patch in a very primitive way so that it kept catching up with the face. We didn't do what would now be called motion tracking;

00:18:29

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

the face would move and then the eye patch would move to cover the eye for a moment, until they moved again. And it was a nice little piece. I think they used it for a couple of years as a recruiting tool.

00:19:23

MARK TOSCANO

So around this time, like you said, you were still in Los Angeles, still working at CalArts in order to, well not working as a job, but using the equipment at CalArts. And but then were you coming back east to visit? Or was it, you know, I'm thinking about some of the films that were filmed back here as opposed to, or maybe it was just *Bertha's Children*.

00:19:46

GRAHAME WEINBREN

We would come back east to visit. Roberta's family lived here, so we could stay at their house in Long Beach. So it was good for the summer.

00:20:10

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We'd come back for the summer often, or for some time. We must have shot *Bertha's Children* in, I guess, '76, which is when we were still living in California. I think we came here and we stayed in Jon Gibson and Nancy Topf's loft. Jon Gibson is a member of the Philip Glass Band for 35 years.

00:20:38 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

They had a loft in SoHo —they were among the SoHo pioneers, actually. And they had two floors, one floor that was finished with a dance floor where Nancy gave classes and they also lived on that floor. And Jon had the second floor of the building which was very unfinished. Roberta had the idea of doing something with her family [GW: which always fascinated me].

00:21:02 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I never had any family except my parents. So the idea of this extended family with multiple cousins at various removes was something I never experienced and I never could quite understand the nature of these relationships. They're not your friends, they're not your parents, so to me it was yet another kind of foreignness.

00:21:23 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Now I have sisters-in-law and nephews and nieces etc., so I understand it a little better. But at that time I didn't. As I said earlier, I grew up in England, and my parents' family was in South Africa, and we never saw them. So yeah, so this notion of the grandmother's sister's children that were related to Roberta and she knew them well, I found very fascinating.

00:21:56 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Being English and all, I was very conscious of the way class difference plays out in the United States. I was very aware, for example, of the fact that many, many of the students at CalArts came from a different social class than Roberta, and probably I did, too.

00:23:13 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

On the one hand, she wanted to celebrate and record and make a portrait of her family. Then there was the idea of taking them out of their environment and bringing them to the kind of place that they had never been in. And then, again, trying to think of some kind of musical structure that could hold this material together, and at the same time give you quite a compelling portrait of who these people, and what their lives were like.

00:23:45 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So all of these factors kind of came together to make *Bertha's Children*. Anthony Forma, again, shot it. He was living in New York already. We shot it with, really without much of an idea in mind of how we were going to put it together. We covered the windows with newspaper because there would be too much light coming in from outside if we didn't.

00:24:37 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We could have used gels, but I thought newspapers would be more interesting. And they give a nice kind of soft light on the subjects. Then we took it back to California and we kind of worked through how we were going to put it together using the optical printer. We made our mates out of torn paper, echoing the newspaper on the windows, and developed the idea of breaking up these extraordinary human subjects in a mathematical way, where you first see each character first full screen, then double screen, then triple screen, then four. It's a simple mathematical structure.

00:25:13 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And of course once Bertha's children were there, we didn't know what to have them do, so we talked to them a little bit, interviewed them a little bit. But basically just had them walk across the room and do these very everyday actions.

00:27:17 GRAHAME WEINBREN

Bertha's Children was a big hit. It was a real breakthrough film. It was shown all over the place, everybody just loved *Bertha's Children*. And we liked that, so we wanted to make another film that would somehow be as popular. But you can't make a film with that in mind.

00:27:43 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

You have to eliminate any ideas of who your audience is, and how they're going to feel about it: that's not what artists do, it's what producers who make commercials do. But I think when we were making *Siblings* we had that thought in our heads. And it was a kind of study, a portrait of a few different brothers, brothers and sisters.

00:28:06 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We took them out to the Vasquez Rocks. Larry Stein and his brother, I don't remember who was, else was in it. We did a tremendous amount of work. We're, Roberta was taking a, taking advantage of the kind of overlapping aspects of CalArts. She was taking a printing workshop, and she did photo offset printing of a huge number of posters of one of the people.

00:28:27 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

It was too, all too deliberate. It wasn't organic enough, I don't think. There are a lot of very deliberate highly technical actions in it. And it was supposed to be a study of siblings, on the same order of *Bertha's Children*. So, somehow it got sent in to a local television station. I forget why, for a competition.

00:28:47 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And the guy phones us up. Did Roberta tell you this story? The guy from the television station comes up and says, you've won first prize. We're going to show it tomorrow, and you've won first prize, and it's a few thousand dollars, and I thought, that's great. Maybe we were right. Then a few hours later we got a call again saying, sorry, no, no, no, we, we, we decided you, you didn't win first prize.

00:29:11 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Somebody else did, and we're not going to show the film. Somehow I felt, for me that's a kind of a, that story is somehow right. You know, it kind of expresses how I feel about that film. I guess, I guess we should look at it again.

00:29:58 **MARK TOSCANO**

But it's, it's absolutely fascinating, it's very bizarre. It might be your strangest film.

00:30:07 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Really?

00:30:08 **MARK TOSCANO**

In a way, though, I think it's good. I think, I, I enjoyed it. I, I went in very curious because you had both described it in negative terms.

00:30:16 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

We pulled it. We withdrew it from what we showed.

00:30:22 **MARK TOSCANO**

So I wanted to bring that one up, even though there are other films that pertain to this theme, which is this idea of labor, you know, the work, and the incredible amount of work that went into all of these films.

00:30:41 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Mm hmm.

00:30:43 **MARK TOSCANO**

I mean, even the, it's not even a, a fair description, I was going to say even the simplest of the films, but none of them are simple in any way whatsoever. I mean, they're very conceptually rigorous and dense, I mean they communicate very, very deeply, I think as much as a density that can't be penetrated at all.

00:31:05 **MARK TOSCANO (CONTINUED)**

But, but a lot of this comes from these very rigorous systems, which especially at a time with 16 millimeter film production required an enormous amount of, just simple man hours of work.

[00:31:16](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

That's right.

[00:31:15](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

And you speak about *Making Of Americans*. I mean, once the computer decided how frequent each of the six women were going to pop up in that little section, it was just a matter of you, almost like slaves to the computer is having to make that happen by cutting it, and printing all this kind of stuff. So I was wondering if you could talk however long you want but also about this notion of in many of the films the work being transparent or part of the film.

[00:31:42](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

We certainly never intended to make films that would be a lot of work. That was not the idea. So, and it was always in every case, still is, surprising how much it takes. There's always a shock and an unpleasant shock to find out how much it takes to make any of these films. Even the film that that we just finished last December.

[00:32:11](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN \(CONTINUED\)](#)

Bertha's Grandchildren turns out to be another one in this series. So but I began to realize that in fact this is what it takes to make a film. And that in fact in Hollywood films, it's a huge amount of labor, except it's spread out among, among a huge number of people. And it's even worse now that they do all these digital stuff.

[00:32:46](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN \(CONTINUED\)](#)

It's an incredibly labor intensive occupation. In our case we, we tended to do things, as I say, that would go against what the equipment was designed for. Which meant that our labor was unusual. And I became interested in the fact that in Hollywood films, in commercial films, that labor is always covered up.

[00:33:17](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN \(CONTINUED\)](#)

They never want it, they want to make it look like a natural object, it wasn't produced by anybody. It doesn't have an author, we're looking at a slice of life. Which just happened and kind of emerged, and, and it seemed to me that it was, would be interesting to include some aspect of that process, or the labor that it took to make a film, in the content of the film itself.

[00:33:43](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN \(CONTINUED\)](#)

Why cover it up, you know? And you know it's a kind of a lie to, to cover it up. So *Murray And Max Talk About Money* . . .

[00:33:58](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

Margaret And Marion?

[00:33:59](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

Margaret And Marion more so, I'm actually thinking of *Future Perfect*.

[00:34:04](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

Future Perfect yeah.

[00:34:06](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

All those films in a way took these other subjects that we're interested in, all at the same time, tried to incorporate the whole notion of the labor of making the piece into the piece itself. *Margaret And Marion* less I think. But certainly *Murray And Max* and *Future Perfect*. So it was an element that we kind of ignored in that earlier work, but it was brought in I think, for *Murray And Max*.

[00:34:35](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

Murray And Max.

[00:34:36](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

Murray And Max.

[00:34:37](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

'79.

[00:34:38](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

The subject of *Murray And Max* is indeed work, labor and the construction of the film, is clearly a result of that labor. And of course David Wilson painting the wall again and again is picture of labor. So none of the other issues that we had was dropped, none of the other interests that I was talking about already was dropped. But just that was added in as another element that, that would kind of speak in the film.

[00:35:11](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

Then *Future Perfect*, I mean it's even more foregrounded in, in a way that you have to, that the markings all over the actual filmstrip.

[00:35:20](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

Yes, exactly right.

[00:35:21](#)

[MARK TOSCANO](#)

And that really is reinforcing to the audience.

[00:35:24](#)

[GRAHAME WEINBREN](#)

But, you know, the, the interesting thing about *Future Perfect* is we didn't realize how much work it was going to take to mark it up. I mean, we wanted to make a film that was about the process of making it. Where the different tenses that went into the cinema, into the piece, were very clear.

00:35:47 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

You know, shooting would be the past tense, the statements that look toward the future would be the future tense, and the actual marks, you would look back from forward to the time when the marks would have been made and back into the time when they were shot. But I didn't really think at that time of the amount of labor that it would take.

00:36:04 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I mean, we had, we had that thing out on our editing bench, in our loft on Water Street for six months. And, you know, every day one of us, mostly Roberta, would put in a couple of hours. Putting in those dots and lines that had been generated, again, by a computer program.

00:36:29 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

The labor was meant to be foregrounded, but it wasn't meant to be as difficult and time consuming as it was.

00:36:40 **MARK TOSCANO**

So at this point you're back in New York, when you made *Future Perfect*.

00:36:46 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, yeah.

00:36:46 **MARK TOSCANO**

You were in Los Angeles and there's also Oasis to talk about too.

00:37:03 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Well a couple of things. I guess for me the, the biggest factor was this notion that I was going to end up being a second rate philosophy professor for the rest of my life. And I was really terrified of that, and I think I was about to turn 30. So for me it was time to make a big change.

00:37:33 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And of course my life is full of big changes. Changes of place, changes of location, I get a little uneasy when I don't make such a big change. So I mean, Roberta started working for the film business, so she was, she was doing assistant editing on big features at that time.

00:37:57 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Beginning to do a little producing, but I think mostly it was in the editing room. We heard that there was, that there was a lot of space available in New York for the first time. Because the city was in terrible financial condition, the businesses were leaving, so there was tons of space.

00:38:17 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So there were a lot of reasons that brought us back to New York. And Oasis was getting uncomfortable. And Oasis was very much kind of our connection with our friends, and the filmmakers in the filmmaking community. So there, all of these different factors made us decide we would try to come back to New York and make a go of it.

00:38:39 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I tried to make a go of it here. I did an editing job, Roberta got me an editing job in California, very strange editing job. So I knew I could probably make a living as a film editor. I worked out well, they invited me back.

00:39:07 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So I kind of knew I could, somewhere or another, end up making my living here as a film editor. I knew there was a lot of editing work that went on in New York. So, yeah, those were the reasons that brought us back here. And we pretty quickly found a loft on Water Street. I think it was 300 dollars a month.

00:39:27 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

You know, and 300, you know, even though it's, what, over, over, almost 30 years ago, 300 dollars a month was not like three thousand dollars a month now. You know, we could, we could afford it by doing little jobs, and patching things together.

00:39:44 **MARK TOSCANO**

Was it Water Street or Wall Street?

00:39:48 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Corner of Water and Wall.

00:39:49 **MARK TOSCANO**

Water and Wall.

00:39:51 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Not quite the corner, just a little out from the corner.

00:39:54 **MARK TOSCANO**

She, she referred to it as an illegal loft, is that...

00:39:58 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

It was not zoned for residence. It was it was above a bar. It was a pretty crummy building. It was a four flight walk up. Pretty dark. The landlords would come around on first of every month, and we'd have to pay them in cash.

00:40:17 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

One of the guys had cards in his hand all the time, a set of playing cards in his hands he was always fiddling with. They were loan sharks., The people on the second floor couldn't pay their rent, they said, it's okay. You don't have to pay this month. You know, but there's a little interest you got to pay on that money that you borrow from us.

00:40:36 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

You're basically borrowing money from us, they explained it. They were gangsters, these guys. But, as long as we paid the rent, we're okay. Then one of them, one of the, one of the partners disappeared for a long time.

00:40:49 **MARK TOSCANO**

The one with the cards?

00:40:49 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah. John and Joe were their names. We never knew their last names. So there was no lease, there was, it was illegal in a number of ways.

00:41:00 **MARK TOSCANO**

How long did you live there?

00:41:02 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

We lived there until '82 or '83 I think.

00:41:12 **MARK TOSCANO**

So from about '78...

00:41:14 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

'78, '78. Yeah, end of '78 I guess, to the beginning of '82.

00:41:22 **MARK TOSCANO**

So you mentioned Oasis and how that wasn't working out. Maybe how that's one of the reasons that you went back to New York. So I guess we should probably talk about that.

00:41:50 **MARK TOSCANO**

But maybe since it's kind of backing up at the end, if you don't mind, maybe talking about The Los Angeles Independent Film Oasis.

00:41:58 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Okay. Amy's [Halpern] title. Amy thought of it. Well, first of all there were a lot of kind of groups that had developed in Los Angeles at this time. But I think, for example, of the Women's Building had just developed in this period. Secondly we would quite often go and hang out at Pat [O'Neill] and Beverly's [O'Neill] and look at movies.

00:42:25 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And I think Beverly said, you know, it would be really great if we had a community like they have in London. There was a London Filmmakers Co-op, and there was Anthology here in New York, and Millennium that Ken Jacobs had started. And she said, it would be really great if we could have something like that here.

00:42:41 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

You know, Beverly is was one of the people of whom I'm most fond in the world, Beverly a lot of ideas, but she doesn't really want them to be carried out. But Roberta and I were full of energy. And we thought that would be great. So we got together all of the experimental filmmakers that we knew in L.A.:

00:43:08 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

David and Diana Wilson, Amy Halpern, Pat and Beverly O'Neill, Morgan Fisher and Susan Rosenfeld, me and Roberta, and some friends of ours. Dennis Phillips, Robin Palanker. I think Bill Moritz came to the first meeting. He said, oh, this will never work, you really don't want to do this.

00:43:37 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

But, we're like, okay, we'll call us Amy said let's call ourselves Oasis, we'll be the film oasis in this desert, in this film desert. And if we can find a space, we'll have a screening. So just up the block from the Women's Building, which Roberta used to go to sometime was this place called The Haymarket, which was the place that the Los Angeles Communist Party used to meet.

00:44:06 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I think they owned the building. So Roberta, who's very dynamic about things, I guess, went and spoke to them. And she said, you know, we do something like you. You know, we're an alternative community, and would you let us have the space for screenings once a week? I said, yeah. And, you know, Mekas' film about Lithuania, *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* or whatever it's called had just come out.

00:44:32 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So we invited Jonas. I don't think Jonas even came, maybe he did. And, and the guy from the *L.A. Times*, Kevin Thomas who was the film reviewer, looked at the film and gave it a positive review, and we had the screening, and the entire Lithuanian population of L.A. came and the place was packed.

00:44:54 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And it was, it was a success. I think we started off every two weeks, screening at The Haymarket. They began to get a little uncomfortable with the work. The films did not have the kind of explicit social impact that they'd hoped for.

00:45:13 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I think we had to bring a projector. We got onto the kind of film circuit. Brakhage came, I think, and Rudy Burkhardt came. And basically everybody passed through. When the British filmmakers toured America, they'd make a Los Angeles stop.

00:45:38 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It was very easy to program, basically, because you know there was always somebody, there was even some publication about who was going on tour and we just put ourselves on the list. So it was mostly single person screenings, traveling filmmakers.

00:45:52 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And then we would screen our own films. We had a mechanism for screening our own films where we could not suggest our own films, but we could pick somebody else's film in the group. And we'd have to write a little program note about it, so there were program notes. Pat would often design the posters that we'd mail out and put up around town.

00:46:14 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

We'd get Kevin Thomas every week to come and review the films in advance. So there was an audience, and, it was quite incredible for a few years. Then we lost the Haymarket. And we, I think we did screenings at USC for a while and having to screen in different places, things started to, as we got more formal and more organized, there started to be tensions within the group.

00:46:43 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

I think we got funding, and that caused a lot of tension. Artists are not really good at corporate kinds of structure. So I think we began to feel as if we were losing our friends.

00:47:08 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It got unpleasant in various ways, which I don't really want to go into much more than that. And with that, and I think it continued for about three or four years more after we left. Paul Arthur moved to L.A. and became involved with it for a little while. But basically it, there were a few years there where it was really utopian and we saw in that period we saw pretty much every experimental film that was being shown publicly in the United States.

00:47:38 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

The filmmakers came, and we met them all, and it was so alive and vital. People don't realize that that period of the '70s was an extremely active and viable and breakthrough period of filmmaking. Because people had learned to kind of overcome the canonization of the six or seven men who were the self-nominated "essential cinema."

00:48:04 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

We were making films that were very different from those filmmakers named by P. Adams Sitney. And it was vital and extraordinarily interesting. Filmmakers thinking about the possibility of alternative narrative and different kinds of structures, and different ways of composing cinema.

00:48:24 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It's kind of a forgotten period, a period that's not paid much attention to, and a number of the filmmakers from that period are not shown very much, even though they're still working. The...

00:48:37 **MARK TOSCANO**

In, in general, or do you...

00:48:39 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

In general.

00:48:39 **MARK TOSCANO**

Uh not just Los Angeles?

00:48:41 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

In general. The women broke through. Leslie Thornton is shown a lot, Abigail Child is shown, Sue Friedrich is shown. But the men, Peter Rose, Ken Kobland, not much. I can think of a lot of people who really, whose work is developed and is exciting and should be shown, and somehow are not thought of as part of the canon. If you made films before 1972, fine. And if you made films about after 1983, it's pretty good. But there's this period in there that is I

00:50:00 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

No, I think it's general. I mean, I don't think it's just L.A. I mean, I think they, we need someone like you in New York. You know, to look at this group of really, I think, extraordinary filmmakers who were working in that period. You know, I mean, yes, the work gets shown occasionally here and there. But, you know, it's not you never see it, for example, in the *Views From The Avant Garde*.

00:55:23 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Fulkerson was very interested as a composer and performer in the idea of graphic scores. It's halfway between improvisation and scored music.

00:55:44 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So he asked us over a period to make a number of different pieces that he could use as graphic scores. And the first ones were slide pieces—we shot street lights at night. The images could be interpreted in an almost literal way as a musical score.

00:56:08 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The piece was composed of a series of slides, and we had a dissolve unit, so we performed those pieces a lot. There are a few of them. I think they were called *Patterns And Processes*. Fulkerson likes to number his pieces, so *Patterns And Processes 1 – 6* were the first series. These were slide pieces.

Roberta and I met Jim Fulkerson in Buffalo. We worked with him beginning I guess in 1970.

00:57:32 GRAHAME WEINBREN

I don't think we were deliberately referencing Cage, but I do know Cage made pieces called *Cheap Imitations*. I'm not sure we knew that at the time.

00:57:55 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

one is not only influenced artistically, one is also influenced by places you get your work shown, and the kind of culture of cinema that the exhibition spaces support. At that period the way one showed one's work is one traveled around with a program of films. And it was always good when the program was unified in some way or another.

00:58:17 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

It made a more coherent program. So partly because of that reason, we started to make this series that would be a program called “Cheap Imitations.”

00:58:36 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

For the first one was somebody had given me a description of a Meliés film, *The Exploding Head*. And we cast David Wilson as the head. I wish I'd seen the film because it's much more extreme than our film. But it's a nice little record of David Wilson's head, and Stuart Fox as the magician,

00:59:22 MARK TOSCANO

Yeah.

00:59:22 GRAHAME WEINBREN

as Meliés himself. Although Meliés, it turns out, used his own head, which we could have done. I was interested in the idea of a false description generating a film, especially if person who described the film had mis-described it. It went from visual images to memory to language to a new film. In those days it wasn't that easy to see a film.

00:59:49 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

We didn't have Blockbuster or Netflix and you couldn't see it online. So I don't know how I could have seen the Meliés film unless somebody programmed it, or I'd gone to an archive which I didn't really know about. Anyway, so the Melies film was the first one of the *Cheap Imitations* project. Then we found in the Strand a book about Hugh Diamond's early photographs.

01:00:18 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Now Hugh Diamond was an English photographer working from about 1845 to about 1855. Photography was invented in 1839, announced by Niepce in Paris, and simultaneously by Fox Talbot in London. So Diamond's photographs are from the very, very early days of photography. Six years into photography, they had to develop their own cameras, their own processing.

01:00:49 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Hugh Diamond was the director of the Springfield Mental Institution. He took pictures of all his patients. I found the book of these extraordinary pictures of the inmates of the Springfield Mental Asylum in the 1850s.

01:01:18 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

These were not daguerreotypes. Diamond collaborated with Fox Talbot, who had invented a paper negative process. Extraordinary gray tones, beautifully blacks, really wonderful. They were pictures of the asylum inmates, mostly female: insane women. So we made a film of me imitating these mad women.

01:01:41 GRAHAME WEINBREN

I don't even know if that exists anymore.

01:01:43 MARK TOSCANO

The reason I haven't looked at it is because there's only a spliced together original.

01:01:50 GRAHAME WEINBREN

That's what we used to show.

01:01:52 MARK TOSCANO

It's pretty beat up.

01:01:54 GRAHAME WEINBREN

I was interested in making a film that would show the marks of its own kind of exhibition. So it is beat up, it did have splices, it's put together in a very rough way, deliberately. It consists of the photographs Diamond's mad women, and me imitating them.

01:02:20 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The set and the costumes are constructed of stuff that was around the house, which could kind of replicate their things. The best part of it is that Roberta as Director is off camera, looking at the picture, and telling me how to get into position, how to get into pose to imitate it.

01:02:42 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And then we got an English actor to read Hugh Diamond's descriptions of these women, descriptions which are based on the images: he reads their condition out of their images. But of course he's constructed their condition.

end of tape 2

TAPE 3: GRAHAME WEINBREN

00:00:07

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Hugh Diamond collaborated with a psychologist whose name was John Conolly. And they had the idea that photography could be used as a kind of diagnostic tool.

00:00:28

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The idea was that the psychologist would look at the photograph and from the subject's position, the way she was holding her head, the expression in her eyes, the twist of the body, the slope of the shoulders, etc., he'd be able to read the condition of the patient. I was very interested in this, because I saw it as a basic metaphor for the epistemological foundation of photography.

00:00:46

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

A photograph is not an independent, objective record of reality. It's shaped in many ways: by the photographer's choice of subject, the framing, the lighting, printing etc. For example one interesting thing about these Hugh Diamond photographs, if you look at all of them, there are about a dozen, there are only three of four dresses that are shared among all the women.

00:01:13

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

They had to dress in their best clothes for the photo session. They were all posed in very specific, tense positions. You can see intimidation in their eyes, fear of the photographer; who was also the director of the institution in which they were housed, probably against their will. The woman described as suffering from 'religious mania,' sits with her body twisted and her hands pressed together, her eyes turned upward and a bible by her side. It's clear that the photographer had them pose in the position that he thought exemplified their condition.

00:01:36

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And then to go to the next step and read that very condition out of the photograph is compounding the ideology. I made an interactive piece based on these same photographs about 15 years later called *Frames*. The photographs are wonderful, they're elegant, they are brimming with what I see as the basic ideology of photography.

00:04:33 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So I found this interesting, so I went out and I filmed him several times. I think we did sound as well. I think we did synch sound, as much as it was possible with the limited equipment we had. And then we had Stuart Seide, again, in a very *Cheap Imitations* way, imitate them. He studied the preacher's voice and gestures. But instead of trying to replicate his diatribe, he described his gestures as he performed them.

00:04:58 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

"I point up and then I point down!" That kind of thing, said in the voice of the preacher, which is intercut with the footage of the preacher. It is about the language of gesture, suggesting that gestures are as meaningful as the words they accompany.

00:05:14 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So that was, that went with *Cheap Imitations Part Two, Mad Women* and that was *Cheap Imitations Part Three, Point Point*. I don't think there was a part four.

00:05:25 **MARK TOSCANO**

Well, you have a part six which is *Terms Of Analysis* as, as far as I can understand it there seemed to be a four and five that maybe got abandoned, and one of them seemed to be called *The Size Of Their Guns*.

00:05:40 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah.

00:05:39 **MARK TOSCANO**

Which then is kind of reiterated in part six.

00:05:41 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

I think that's right.

00:05:45 **MARK TOSCANO**

But I thought that meant they were unfinished projects.

00:05:46 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

There was one called *The Size Of Their Guns* which used a short piece from Howard Hawkes' *Red River* where the two actors Montgomery Clift and John Ireland compare their guns, they are both looking at their guns, "Can you make it shoot?"

00:06:17 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

"Yeah, I can make it shoot." Let's try it then. It's an early repressed version of *Brokeback Mountain*, embedded right there in the middle of *Red River*, a typically macho cowboy film. So we intercut *The Size Of Their Guns* with some other material so as to bring out this hidden aspect that always gets lost in the narrative.

00:06:36 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

That was *The Size Of Their Guns*, but we incorporated it into *Terms Of Analysis*, which is, again, a collaboration with Fulkerson. Its main subject is the construction of Roberta's space on 21st Street. It's much more a stream of consciousness film: it doesn't have the type of heavily conceptual basis that tended to characterize our previous films.

00:07:04 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

People have interpreted it as a record of the end of our personal relationship. I don't quite know how to read it that way, but it's true that the film came from a very personal place. It probably has something of an inscrutable quality.

00:07:22 **MARK TOSCANO**

I mean there's the, the other lot of unusual sequences, postcards, or photos are being...

00:07:28 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Spread with jam, yeah.

00:07:32 **MARK TOSCANO**

Spread with jam.

00:07:32 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah.

00:07:33 **MARK TOSCANO**

And the newspaper...

00:07:35 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, that...

00:07:35 **MARK TOSCANO**

...and closing everything.

00:07:39 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, there's a lot of different kinds of images: nature postcards spread with butter and jam, the destruction of a wall of newspapers shown in a series of tracking shots, scenes of downtown New York, Roberta finding an axe in a messy office desk drawer, etc. It was somehow expressing a lot of ideas that I didn't want to think about consciously; or I didn't want to put into the language of concepts. They erupt in the film in a way that I never even wanted to analyze.

00:08:08 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

There's a long tradition of this approach to cinema, which I guess neither of us had really participated in before. I love watching it now. I don't know what it says, but it speaks to me. It's possibly my favorite of our 16mm films.

00:08:32

MARK TOSCANO

It seems, it feels like a transitional work. I mean, because it's the last film...

00:08:37

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah, yeah.

00:08:38

MARK TOSCANO

...you did before [unintelligible].

00:08:39

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Yeah, yeah.

00:08:40

MARK TOSCANO

I realize I forgot about *Vicarious Thrills*.

00:08:45

GRAHAME WEINBREN

Vicarious Thrills. That was a part of a program we called *Works for Film and Trombone* that I toured with Jim Fulkerson. We were like rock and roll musicians. We'd do a different show every night. Not like rock and roll musicians in that we'd play in a stadium; mostly we'd perform in a really dumpy place and there'd be four or five people in the audience. But we were on tour in the sense of getting to the hotel, playing the show, getting up the next morning, traveling to the next gig. There was funding in Germany for this kind of enterprise—I believe Noll Brinckmann arranged the whole thing.

00:09:22

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Vicarious Thrills was made for that program. By that time I was already working for the film business as an editor. We often needed what was called "sound fill" for film projects: long sections of film that would function as silent sections of the soundtrack. We'd buy it by the reel from film labs as single perf prints the labs were discarding, since they made many test prints that they'd not release to the client. That's one of the reasons that answer prints were always so expensive: the lab would have made several test prints before they even showed one to you.

00:10:11

GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And then they'd sell the prints as sound fill. One time actually, as a matter of fact, just to go back a little bit, *Terms Of Analysis* showed up in my editing room as sound fill. It was a bit of a shock.

00:10:26

MARK TOSCANO

Really?

00:10:25 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yes. Sometimes you'd just look at the sound fill, when you were on a job, just to see what it was. So one time I got this cache of porn. This was really great, and we decided to make use of it. So we hung up the film like laundry in our studio and wandered through it with the camera, we made a loop out of some scenes, we bleached it and tried all kinds of methods to get rid of the image.

00:10:52 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

And no matter what you do, unless you eliminate all the emulsion leaving only clear leader, the image always comes bleeding through, and you could always see the pumping head of the girl and the genitals. *Vicarious Thrills* is about the failed attempt to eliminate the pornographic image at the center of cinema.

00:11:10 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Fulkerson continued the idea with this piece for amplified trombone that was so loud that it was really hard for the viewer to see anything. [GW: Though not as loud as people are used to now.] So it was all about not seeing, at least that was the idea. But now that we look back at it, it actually turns out to be quite beautiful.

00:11:40 **MARK TOSCANO**

Yeah, well I first encountered it on the DVD that you put together and it's silent.

00:11:47 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Yeah, yeah.

00:11:48 **MARK TOSCANO**

And I had no idea that it was as loud as...

00:11:51 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Right, right.

00:11:54 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

So even through all this period we were still doing a lot of performance work and collaboration with other artists and so on, even though we were also committed to making films.

00:12:03 **MARK TOSCANO**

But then I mean, what, what could have possibly lead to the [unintelligible]? Although that would fall outside the time period of this project, it's still such an important piece. It, it's really, in many ways, [unintelligible] .

00:12:26 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

I was working as a film editor, because as you know, experimental filmmakers do not make their living by making experimental films. Everybody has to have a job.

00:12:46 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I was sick of teaching. Never made enough money, and it took too much out of you, took too much out of me. So I started to work in the film business. Roberta was already working in the film business as a film editor. And from about '78, '79, '80, I developed a reputation as a film editor who would take on weird projects.

00:13:22 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

No other experimental filmmakers worked in the film business at this time. In fact you couldn't admit when you had a screening that you worked for the film industry, because the experimental film culture saw commercial film as the enemy. A major underpinning of the experimental film culture turned around a rejection of the film industry. This was one of the reasons why the L.A. filmmakers were more or less excluded: every filmmaker in LA had a freelance day job in the film industry.

00:14:15 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So I had this reputation, and I was working on a television show. One day this guy Tom Nicholson came in. He was looking for an editor for what he called an interactive video job, something we'd never heard of. It was brand new – there were no interactive video designers, so he thought of the film editor as having the right skill set.

00:14:37 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

All they had to show us was *The Aspen Project* which was the famous project that was produced as a demo by the Architecture Machine Group. It was similar in concept to the current Google Street Views, but at that point it represented a very significant change in technology and an important breakthrough. Using computer controlled laserdisc, and you could travel around the streets of Aspen on the TV monitor by touching the screen.

00:15:03 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

But it was a demo. As is well known, and this is something that MIT is proud of, they never completed projects, they demo'ed them. A museum design company called *Ramirez And Woods* had won the contract for designing the American pavilion of the 1982 World's Fair. It had been proposed during the Carter administration, the subject was energy, and it was going to be in Knoxville, Tennessee.

00:15:28 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Ramirez and Woods won the contract based on the idea that they would use the technology developed at MIT to make a number of interactive video stations. This would be the first interactive video ever presented in a public situation. The design firm decided that the MIT graduates, who had set up a company for the project, were very good for the technology, but were not for the content.

00:15:58 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So Tom Nicholson looked around for a film editor who could handle the idea of structuring cinematic elements in such a way that viewers could navigate through them and get the information that interested them. As a first step, before I arrived, they had gathered every industrial film on energy they could find. These were of course 16mm films, which included things like the best kind of bolts and connectors to use on an oil rig. Or how to assemble pumps for a nuclear energy plant. They were industrial films often made as manuals for the use of the particular tools. Or to sell a particular piece of coal mining equipment. Before I got the job they had collected hundreds of these films.

00:16:53 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I walked into the office and there was a wall of shelves containing about 500 boxes of 16mm energy industrials. The idea was that these films were to be the basis of 13 interactive video stations. The former MIT students were designing the software, and, I was told, they would design it based on our requirements.

00:17:21 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

This was September and the fair was opening the following May. So I was interested, and I did take it on. It was a very intense period. We ended up using the films only for images, and built narration, soundtracks and music from scratch, and I built up a staff of over 20 people. I knew nothing about interactivity—well, almost nobody did. There are many little stories about this. For example, in the middle of the project, the producer came in and said that we should have 'menus'.

00:17:50 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I'm, like, menus? Menus are for restaurants, we're making cinema, not food. Everything was a new idea. I didn't like the idea of menus on screen, forcing the viewer to make deliberate choices. My idea is that the viewer would be traveling along a cinematic stream, and they could navigate onto other streams by touching different parts of the screen. As a filmmaker, I wasn't interested in static screens. So this was how I constructed the first public interactive videos: you'd see along this montage of coal and oil and wind power and nuclear power, with matching music, and you could touch the screen at any point and it would branch off to tell you more about, for example, oil power if you happened to touch the image of the men working on an oil rig. Now you were in a montage about oil, and you could touch the screen at any point during that to get more information. The more you touched the screen, the more specific the information became.. It was always a continuously flowing cinematic experience, and whenever you touch there would be an effective edit to more detailed information, ending up with screens full of text.

00:18:36 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

It was a phenomenal amount of work. I was working 13 or 14 hours a day, and it was tough. But I made money and it was good in that way.

00:19:22 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I was young enough to do something like this, and while I was doing it, I realized that this was exactly what I'd been thinking about as an experimental filmmaker since I started 10 years earlier — which was looking for ways to restructure time so you weren't hampered by a notion of linear time with beginnings and middles and ends, which determined so many aspects of cinema. Interactivity gave me nonlinear temporal structure.

00:19:48 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And so as soon as the job was over I suggested to Roberta that we think about making this piece, which as a film actually I'd intended to make all the time about the connection between this Freud dream and this Schubert song, “Erl Koenig” and the Freud “Burning Child Dream,” a connection that had been pointed out to me by my friend and collaborator Christine Noll Brinckmann.

00:20:20 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

The idea was to construct an interactive piece where the viewer discovers the connection between the two fundamental late 19th century texts. We did the whole thing. We developed the technology from mostly off-the-shelf hardware [GW: Sony had just produced a computer that was designed to interact with laserdiscs, but we did have to get one piece of hardware designed and built for us]. I worked with my brother on the software, and of course we produced all the images. We started off using our own money.

00:20:47 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

No, we couldn't get funding because nobody believed artists could pull it off. We started the piece in 1981, and finally got NEA and NYSCA funding in 1983 or 1984. It is arguably the first interactive video piece made by an artist.

00:21:16 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

It followed the principles I had developed for the World's Fair: it is structured around cinematic screens that the viewer can interrupt, branching off to another related cinematic stream, and it's designed so that every time the computer makes an edit, it's a 'good' cut. We managed this by separating sound and image, so that the system could continue the sound under an edit.

00:21:39 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

So pictures may change, but the music stays the same. All of this took a massive development of both software and hardware. It was before graphics user interfaces, before the Mac or Windows, so it was straight simple programming. This was in one way an advantage, because we didn't have to manage the overhead of the graphic interface, and we could do a lot of it ourselves, though we did end up bringing in professional expertise to finish it.

00:22:06 **GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)**

Roberta was working as a producer, she was producing feature films at the time, so we could use the studios and the kind of equipment and the crews to shoot some of those scenes. So Erl King has very high production values. Everything came together for that piece. And now it's in the collection of the Guggenheim.

00:22:32 **MARK TOSCANO**

I've only seen the scripted video.

00:22:37 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

The documentation, yeah.

00:22:38 **MARK TOSCANO**

The documentation, which one, one thing, I was a little confused about one specific thing, which is when was it finished and shown?

00:22:46 **GRAHAME WEINBREN**

Well, that's the interesting question. Many contemporary museums wanted to show artists' interactive video, because suddenly interactivity had entered the culture.

00:23:10 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So I promised to show it at the Walker, promised it was going to open at the Walker Art Center. It was really great, it must have been '85. We didn't get it finished. And so we had to show it as a non-interactive video installation, since the time and space was booked. Bruce Jenkins was the curator, was phenomenally sympathetic and really wonderful about it.

00:23:34 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And we showed it as an installation, a three screen, a three, three channel installation. That was '85. We finished it in time for the opening of MOCA, the, the, the new Isizaki Building. And Julia Lazar programmed it, very brave move on her part, actually. As the opening video piece at MOCA.

00:23:55 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And then, in the big museum, and it was finished and it worked. And I also had to become an installation artist, because a curator would book the piece and then say, okay, well send us your installation plans. I didn't know I needed installation plans. I was making a movie for a screen that you touch. But yes, it turned out that we did need installation plans in order to separate the person who was operating, from the viewers.

00:24:17 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Because we didn't have the culture we have now where nobody would dream of leaning over your shoulder when you're doing something on a touch screen computer. At that time people poked their fingers in all at once. So we had to build a kind of private space for the individual viewer, and a more public space that people could watch what was going on and learn the interface by looking at a second screen.

00:24:37 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

So I hooked up with Chip Jeffries, an installation designer, and we made a different installation for each exhibition.

I've made six major funded interactive cinema installations that have been shown on every continent except Africa, I think. And I've traveled around the world with them, and it's been really great. And pretty much using the same kind of ideas, I think, that were developed for the films in the '70s.

00:25:57 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Of course one's work develops and changes, and different things are brought in.

00:27:02 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

I've made quite ambitious pieces, which has been really satisfying. But I've lost interest in interactivity in the last few years. As it moved more and more into the center of the culture and became the name of what happens on the internet, it lost its flavor for me. And I've never been interested in point and click structures, and I feel as if choice and menus are really great for shopping, but terrible for art.

00:27:35 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

None of my interactive work ever depended on choice. It was always based on viewers responding to what was onscreen, so that the screen would respond back to them, so it's a kind of a dynamic relationship between viewer and screen, and not choosing from a list of items which in my view is always based on consumerism.

00:27:58 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And so recently I've, I've been making a number of time lapse works based on different things. Mostly paintings. And I have a piece that, my current piece is called *Fifty Letters*, which is 50 one minute pieces, many of them time lapse, made with a new moving image playback system that is visibly and phenomenologically far superior to any commercial HD.

00:28:34 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

Made in collaboration with the software engineer, Isaac Dimitrovsky. And it's interactive in the sense that I show it in a theater, and the audience shouts out which piece they want to see next. What they see on the screen is a grid of letters. So they shout out the letter A, and we show the film that goes with A, which is one minute long to the frame.

00:29:04 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

And then also some letters have more than one film, so that I can also keep some control over the sequence that they're showing it. So, for example M, I think, has four or five films. And they tell a story, it's a narrative, you get one episode each time you choose M. So it's kind of, again, being able to work with the indeterminacy of the overall sequence, so I don't know, I never know what sequence these 50 films are going to come up in.

00:29:31 GRAHAME WEINBREN (CONTINUED)

But also having a lot of control over the elements, which is a thing I've always been interested in, and, and that's what I'm, that's what I'm working on now. And, and it will get shown this year at the San Jose Biennial. *01* it's called. Yeah, that's my story.

end of tape 3